DEUTSCHE AFRIKA-LINIEN
JOHN T. ESSBERGER

news

December/2024 The Group's In-House Magazine www.rantzau.de

Changes in DAL/JTE management

On 2 December 2024 Dr Eberhart von Rantzau and Heinrich von Rantzau, managing owners of the DAL/JTE group of companies, informed about an important management change in the group. Quote:

"Sven Schwarz, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), has left the company. The past few months have shown that there is no sustainable basis for long-term cooperation between Mr Schwarz and the management. We will try to fill the position of CEO of the group in the coming months. Until then we have put interim solutions in place to ensure the management of our company: ***Dr Arif Reschke*** and ***Silke Steinfurt*** have been appointed members of the board on an interim basis. ***Johann Isaksen*** will be speaker of the Executive Board with immediate effect." *(page 3)*

Johan Isaksen, speaker of the Executive Board

Photo: Ortwin Muehr

Aurora borealis, the typical colours red over green with a touch of blue in the middle. Seen on 10 October 2024 in the countryside between the ports of Hamburg and Bremen: a touch of Christmas lights

Sky in flames – Solar wind outbreak triggered northern lights over North Sea

Nice to look at but the aurora borealis interferes with navigation and communication

I looked, and, behold, a stormy wind came from the north, a great cloud and an unceasingly flaming fire, surrounded by a bright glow. And from its centre, in the midst of its fire, it shone like shining metal."

As long as 2,500 years ago, the prophet Ezekiel reported on a Babylonian cuneiform document about a phenomenon in the sky that probably describes auroras. In the second half of 2024, pronounced auroras could be marvelled at several times, which even shone green and red in our latitudes. The photo on this page of DAL/JTE News was taken on the night of 10/11 October by Ortwin Muehr in the countryside halfway

(continued on page 2)

In 2024, we celebrated the centenary of John T. Essberger. It fills us with pride that we have been able to maintain our identity and independence as a family business for three generations and that we are in good financial health today.

This year, however, we not only looked back, but also made important decisions for the future. After taking delivery of four new chemical tankers from China, we are now in the process of planning two plus four more newbuilds from China, which have been ordered for delivery as of spring 2027.

These vessels will be larger at 13,000 dwt and will be equipped with additional cargo tanks to give E&S Tankers greater operational flexibility and replace older tonnage. We have taken this decision at a time when the world is in a state of political and economic upheaval not seen since the end of the Second World War. This presents risks, but also opportunities for resolving conflicts and obstacles that also affect the shipping industry. The fact that we have ordered the next generation of tankers at a time when shipyard space is scarce and construction costs are high shows our confidence that we will continue to see stable development in the chemical shipping market. At the same time, we have started an extensive and expensive refit programme to keep our older tonnage competitive.

Our two 2,200 TEU container ships under the flag of Essberger Dry Cargo, which are chartered out until mid-2025 and currently operate in a favourable market environment, are generating good results. I would like to thank all employees for their commitment and loyalty to John T. Essberger, and I wish them a Merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous 2025.

Yours, Eberhart von Rantzau

US Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration predicts solar wind outbreaks hitting the Earth

(continued from page 1)

between the ports of Hamburg and Bremen. Muehr, head of the nautical department of shipping company C.P. Offen, had previously sent out the following warning to all ships:

Kindly be informed that a severe solar wind outbreak was reported by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), hitting the earth now within the next hours. You may encounter a disruption of the Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) received from Global Positioning System (GPS) or GLONASS, the Russian system.

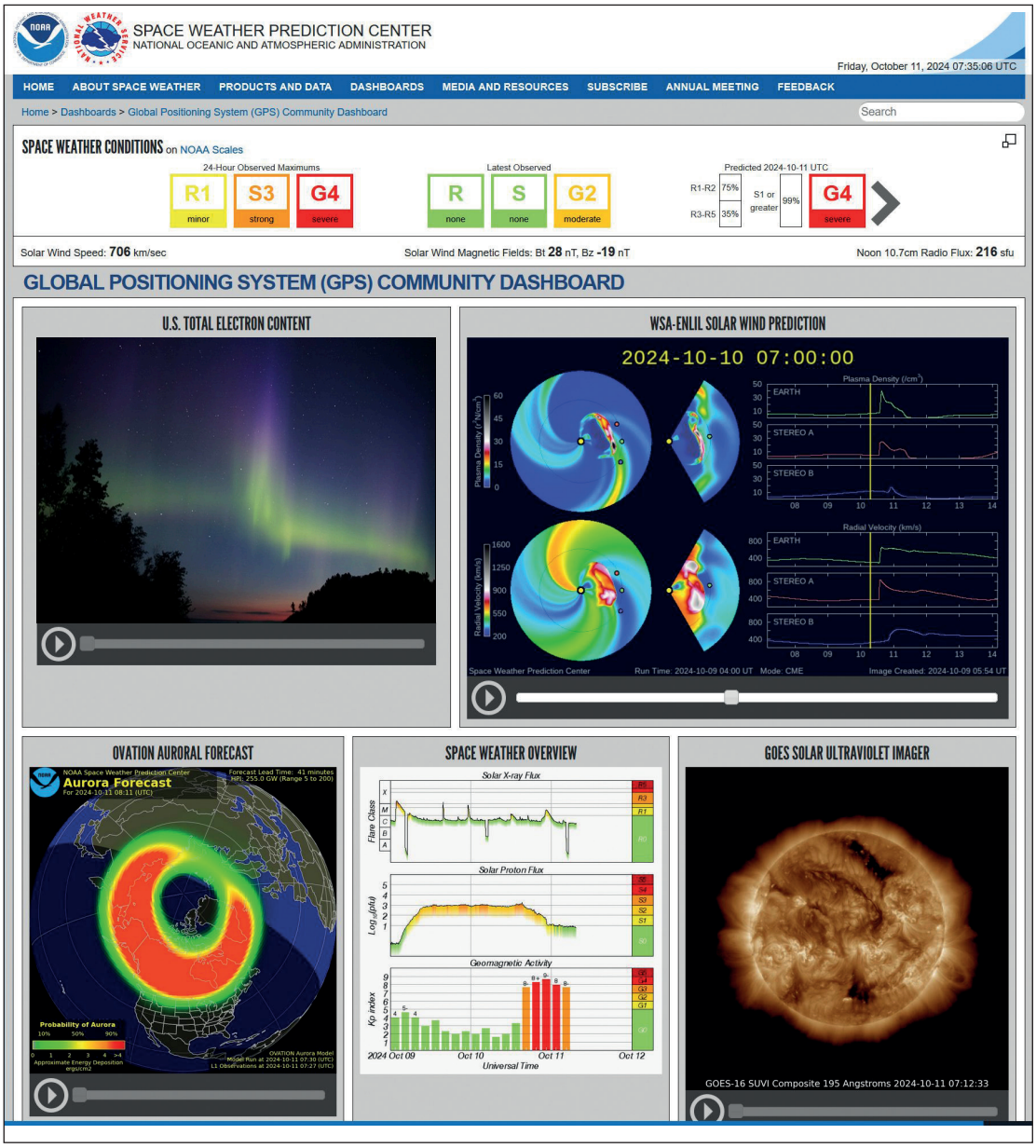
Furthermore, a satellite communication loss or at least interference may be observed with Iridium, Sat-C, Starling, V-Sat, etc. signals.

Take extra caution when plotting your position

Please take extra caution when plotting your position and course. As usual do not rely on satellite navigation only. Strongly advise to conduct additional position fixes by any sort of terrestrial bearings (radar, compass bearings, etc. in case equipment fails.

This warning was preceded by an announcement from the US Space Weather Prediction Center a few hours before: A coronal mass ejection (CME) struck Earth this morning disrupting the Earth's magnetic field and quickly achieving G4 (severe) geomagnetic storm conditions. It comes as the sun approaches – possibly at the peak of its 11-year cycle, when activity heightened. The storm is expected to persist through today and tomorrow, with the potential to reach G5 (extreme) levels – the highest category of geomagnetic storms – last seen in May 2024."

CMEs can wreak havoc with the Earth's magnetosphere, which shields the planet from particle radiation. They can interfere not only with satellites, radio signals and GPO positioning systems. They also pose a threat to power grids. The "Halloween Storms" back in 2003 triggered blackouts in Sweden and damaged the power infrastructure in South Africa. May's storm rendered precision GPS systems used by US farmers across the Midwest and Great Plains unusable, resulting in financial losses. Polar light activities are potentially dangerous for airplanes. They evade storms by flying at lower altitudes or avoid the polar regions.



Forecast of the solar activities on 10 October 2024 supplied by the website of GPS Community Dashboard: solar wind prediction (top), ovation auroral forecast (bottom left) and solar ultraviolet imager (bottom right). The graphics indicate solar X-ray flux and solar proton flux

Solar particles travel with speeds of 1,000 km/s

When the solar particles of the polar lights (aurora borealis in the northern hemisphere, aurora australis in the South), travelling with a speed of 1,000 km/s, hit the Earth's atmosphere they excite chemical elements to glow between the 3rd and 6th parallel. Nitrogen produces blue and violet light, oxygen green and red light. The red light arises in ca. 250 km above the Earth's surface, green light in 120 km, clearly visible in our cover photo. Main areas are the polar regions of Alaska, Canada, Finland, Iceland and Norway. In 2003 polar lights were visible as far south as Greece and the Canary Islands. The main season is from the end of October until December and February to early April.

Smartphone cameras capture light best

The immensely colourful polar lights last October where visible in North America and Northern Europe so way beyond the 6th parallel. What photo amateurs should know: smartphone cameras may be able to capture the celestial display even when it's not visible to the naked eye.

Change in DAL/JTE Management

Dr Arif Reschke, newly appointed member of the Board

Silke Steinfurt, newly appointed member of the Board

Dr Ricardo Alvarez, member of the Executive Board

Malte Willer, member of the Executive Board

German merchant ships continue to be targeted by Houthi rebels

Threatening emails are a worrying signal for shipping in the Red Sea

Our last two chemical tankers (7,125 dwt) delivered from China earlier in 2024, the "John T. Essberger" and "Heinrich Essberger", were forced to take the long journey around the Cape of Good Hope on their way to Europe instead of travelling through the Suez Canal. Because of the war in the Middle East, the passage through the Red Sea had become too dangerous. In particular, the Houthi rebels operating in Yemen are jeopardising merchant shipping with often successful air attacks.

Faced with this serious situation, the German Shipowners' Association (VDR) warned again last November that the situation has not improved. In recent months, VDR and several German shipping companies have received several threatening emails from the Houthi rebels. These threats are directed against ships calling at Israeli ports as well as those passing through the Red Sea, the Bab al-Mandab Strait, the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. According to VDR, the Houthi rebels have well-researched email addresses, as the threats are also sent to individualised contacts. VDR takes these attempts of intimidation very seriously and is therefore in constant dialogue with shipping companies and security authorities. To avoid possible attacks, German shipping companies continue to divert their ships around the southern tip of Africa. This diversion takes almost two weeks longer and incurs high costs.

Since the outbreak of the Gaza conflict in October 2023, almost 200 merchant ships in international waters near Yemen have been attacked by Houthi missiles, drones and cruise missiles. Several sailors have lost their lives and numerous ships have been hijacked, sunk or severely damaged.

Is ethanol the solution for shipping's future?

Dual-fuel engines of our latest 13,000 dwt tankers ordered in China are designed for marine gas oil and ethanol use

The next generation of Essberger chemical tankers (13,000 dwt) will be equipped with dual-fuel engines. They will run on marine diesel (MGO) and are designed for the consumption of particularly environmentally friendly methanol. Methanol is a widely produced industrial alcohol obtained from synthesis gas.

The mixture of hydrogen and carbon monoxide has so far been produced primarily from fossil fuels. In order to be climate-neutral, the so-called e-methanol ("green methanol") must be produced on the basis of renewable energies with a sustainable CO_2 source. Biomethanol or e-methanol with carbon from biomass alone is not a solution for producing fuel on a large scale. Methanol has about half the calorific value of diesel and petrol. The fuel tanks on board must therefore be correspondingly larger. From a technical perspective, methanol offers many advantages. With similar properties to marine diesel, existing infrastructure can continue to be used with only minor adjustments. The rapid solubility of the toxic liquid in seawater means that in the event of accidents or leaks, the risks to marine ecosystems are less serious than with heavy fuel oil and ammonia, for example.

Bio-methanol is currently also regarded by environmental protection organisations as the fuel for shipping of the future. The biggest hurdle is availability. Some ships such as ferries and research vessels have already gained experience with suitable engines. In the meantime, the switch to methanol as a fuel seems to be gaining ground in new construction projects. If shipping companies worldwide want to achieve their goal of making their fleets climate-neutral by 2050, methanol will play an important role.

Current situation and long-term commitment

Patricia von Rantzau gave a speech at the dinner of the traditional Captains and Officers Seminar at the country resort

3/E Serjogins, 2/E Macovei, 2/O Czarnacki, Capt. Dziduszko, Capt. Bienenstok, C/E Belo, 2/E Karpov, C/E Polishchuk, 2/E Mykhalchuk , Capt. Maciuk, C/O Krok,

In November, John T. Essberger held another seminar for captains and officers in Sudermuehlen, the well-known country resort in the Lueneburg Heath outside Hamburg. The traditional dinner with representatives of the Rantzau family took place on 12 November. Speaker was Mrs Patricia von Rantzau, wife of Dr Eberhart von Rantzau, who was not available that night. Mrs von Rantzau gave a summary of the current situation of John T. Essberger/E&S Tankers and the future. These are her main points: "At the end of September, we placed an order at Rainbow Shipyard in China for two 13,000 deadweight tankers, with options for four more ships. These vessels are slightly larger than the chemical tankers we currently use. Thanks to their larger capacity and number of tanks they are more flexible to operate. They will be deployed mainly in the Baltic Sea. We are expecting the first newbuild in April 2027, which will replace older ships in our fleet.

"Annette" and "Agnes Essberger" will turn 20 in 2026, which does not allow them to trade as they are doing today, and especially so since they will not be permitted to call at Neste terminals due to their age restriction, which is also an essential for the Borealis business. Extending the operational lifetime of our fleet is an ongoing process.

The market is currently busy and well-balanced between the number of vessels and cargo. Shipbuilding yards are running at capacity, meaning it will take time to replace older tonnage in the European fleet, including our own.

As a result, we are extending the operational lifetime of several vessels. "Gisela" and "Helga" this year, "Patricia", "Christian", "Emerald" and "Aquamarine" will follow next year. These vessels are expected to operate for up to 30 years.

Given the additional investment required to keep them running beyond 25 years, it is crucial that they are well maintained, pass vetting inspections with good results and perform effectively for our customers to ensure a positive return on investment. The cost level has risen significantly over the past few years, far exceeding our usual experience. This is a concern. We must exercise caution and mitigate these increases wherever possible to ensure we remain competitive.

In order to master the challenges ahead of us, we have recently filled a number of new management positions.

As Jan Eghoej's successor, **Malte Willer** is now in charge as Managing Director of E&S Tankers. Unfortunately, he cannot be with us this evening as he is on a business trip to Norway.

Christian Vang heads the Chartering department as Commercial Director.

David Jones heads the Operations department as Operations Manager.

All three gentlemen have been with Essberger for a long time and will be familiar to you. I am

C/E Boiangiu, 2/E Gradzki, 3/E Ciurariu, 2/O Bosek, 2/O Dejnek, 3/E Kholkin, C/O Kajdasz, C/O Piorkowski, 2/O Skutarenko, 3/O Antalava, Patricia von Rantzau,

of the Essberger chemical tanker fleet

Sudermuehlen

Patricia von Rantzau, C/E Dobrzyniewski, Capt. Santos, Capt. Borek, C/E Popiel, 2/E Karasjov, C/O Podsiadly, C/O Karpovas, C/E Eland, C/O Bula

delighted that we have been able to fill the vacancies with experienced employees from within the company.

Let me now give you a brief market outlook in these economically and politically turbulent times. The chemical industry outlook for 2025 is mixed but we remain carefully optimistic based on customer feedback from the recent meeting of the European Petrochemical Association – EPCA.

Most customers see a stagnation or minor recovery for their products. This aligns with a market study we conducted earlier this year. The vessel supply side is expected to influence the market most in the coming years, with an aging fleet and removal of vessels due to age being the most significant influencing factors in terms of positive supply and demand for owners. Essberger, as the majority owner in E&S, showed a continuous commitment by signing the newbuild orders I mentioned before and remains a strong and reliable partner for both customers and as an employer too.

Customers do appreciate and see our long-term commitment, and we aim to lock in our core volume for longer contract periods.

Last but not least I'd like to express once more my sincere gratitude to all seagoing members of our fleet. We value your work, and we are well aware that the captains, officers and crews on board our ships who keep not only our vessels on course but our shipping company John T. Essberger as a whole."

After the speech, a standing ovation for Patricia von Rantzau.

C/O Drezno, 2/O Vitenchuk, 3/E Botan, 2/O Schippers, C/O Ramanauskas, Capt. de Bos, C/E Steenbergen, C/O Seliverstovs, 2/O Glukhov, 2/E Kaubris, 2/O Paulausks

Whereabouts

December 2024

Ship name	Master	First Mate	Chief Engineer
Agnes Essberger	Takhir Biazitov	Jaroslaw Kawczynski	Piotr Popiel
Amalie Essberger	Wojciech Nowak	Alexander Adodin	Artem Glushko
Anneliese Essberger	Onno Smit	Kokou Gbegan	Jan Lodder
Annette Essberger	Koen Ghysels	John Christopher Domingo	Artur Krupa
Birthe Essberger	Jacek Borysiuk	Robert Halicki	Ruslans Lesciks
Caroline Essberger	Andre Steenbergen	Dominik Kazior	Oebele Kooistra
Charlotte Essberger	Robert Waldon	Svajunas Ramanauskas	Lukasz Zeromski
Christian Essberger	Robert Szmaj	Szymon Stalica	Miroslaw Jaworski
Coral Essberger	Dawid Sadecki	Miroslaw Majer	Jan Niewierowski
Cuno Essberger	Dariusz Swierkosz	Krzysztof Brandalski	Marek Ptasznik
Dutch Aquamarine	Thomas Kijzers	Albertus Konijn	Steven Van Royen
Dutch Emerald	Alex Buren	Sjoerd Rijndorp	Sijbren Mollinga
Eberhart Essberger	Lukasz Antczak	Waldemar Rzepka	Vitaliy Kolesnyk
Ellen Essberger	Arkady Khramushin	Pawel Czarnacki	Roman Kulish
Elsa Essberger	Stefan Grabowski	Nikolay Kirillov	Sergey Varakin
Georg Essberger	Anton Radtsig	Adrian Mariak	Pavlo Polishchuk
Gisela Essberger	Lars Gronlund	Filip Rajner	Pavel Semyonov
Heinrich Essberger	Enrique Lopez	Roman Rybin	Volodymyr Yurkevych
Helga Essberger	Alexander Tkachenko	Martins Taurins	Pavel Kuzma
Johann Essberger	Marcin Harasim	Artem Zatsarnyy	Ruslans Sokolovs
John Augustus Essberger	Adam Krzyzykowski	Mateusz Cygan	Valeriy Bashkurov
John T. Essberger	Maxim Klementevsky	Piotr Adamski	Dmytro Polyavka
Liesel Essberger	Antonio Petinga	Farits Jambajevs	Miroslaw Szylobryt
Lisa Essberger	Nicolaas Van Den Belt	Paul Gene Galotera	Geert Sap
Liselotte Essberger	Arkadiusz Duczynski	Blazej Czapiewski	Andrzej Sullik
Nordic Saga	Menard Responde	Jose Randi III Villanueva	Alexey Yakovlev
Nordic Sira	Harry Reinikka	Richard Calingacion	Mark Angelo Villaronte
Nordic Sola	Magnus Drake Af Hagelsrum	Marlon Bien Gonzaga	Zygmunt Dobrzyniewski
Nordic Sund	Kent Baregg	Michael Mabunay	Alexey Zimenkov
Patricia Essberger	Daniel Kubacki	Szczepan Pachula	Zoran Zambata
Philipp Essberger	Tomasz Rembisz	Valeriy Dorofeev	Taras Popov
Roland Essberger	Marcin Madry	Adrian Kuzmicz	Tomasz Kozlowski
Theodor Essberger	Ali Ayara	Andrei Rosu	Leonid Volkov
Ubena	Janusz Urbanski	Rafel Nones	Gleb Kolechkin
Ulanga	Aleksandr Popov	Erwin Fanugon	Piotr Turski
Ursula Essberger	Albert Ten Wolde	Michal Pietryka	Stefan Kluijfhout
Wilhelmine Essberger	Marco Boshuijzen	Eriks Ciblis	Hendrik Van Schoonhoven

Aus der Reederei-Familie

Jubiläen

40 Jahre

C/E Jan Pieter Lodder, 16.11.1984

25 Jahre

A/B Jason Brito Olalia, 19.01.2000

12,5 Jahre

3/E Jerico Pakingan Mendoza, 20.05.2012

OS Julius Julian Fernandez, 22.05.2012

3/E Rhoel Cosip Pacampara, 28.05.2012

AB Glenn Buizon Robles, 30.05.2012

3/E Lester Serenio Bonotan, 31.05.2012

2/O Kenn Nueva Ecija Pantua, 31.05.2012

C/O Eriks Ciblis, 14.06.2012

C/O Adrian Kuzmicz, 17.06.2012

AB Victor Jr Grajido Baroro, 18.06.2012

MTM Noel Cadungog Estorion, 06.07.2012

MTM Dan Loyd Quillo Pantaleon, 06.07.2012

3/O Julius Pajarillo Babadilla, 10.07.2012

C/O Robert Halicki, 16.07.2012

AB Jessie Albino Castano, 23.07.2012

Besondere Geburtstage

85 Jahre

Olaf Clasen, *Pensionär*, 21.11.1939

Rolf Schultz, *Pensionär*, 27.01.1940

60 Jahre

Betty Radau, *Facility Management*, 18.11.1964

MTM Roseller Banting Espinosa, 20.11.1964

C/E Nicolae Paul Boiangiu, 11.12.1964

50 Jahre

2/E Romeo Dumangcas Tubal, 04.11.1974

2/O Arman Martinez Juanillo, 18.11.1974

CCK Noel Unclara Quiban, 28.11.1974

PMP Roy Delos Reyes Casera, 10.12.1974

2/E Robert Jumig Lasac, 20.01.1975

Capt. Mariusz Borek, 29.01.1975

Neue Mitarbeiter an Land

Carsten Ruthemann, 01.11.2024, *IT*

Timo Otto, 01.12.2024, *IT*

Geheiratet haben

Stephan Priess, 11.10.2024, *Ship Management*

Wir gedenken

Brigitta Schwencke (93 Jahre), Oktober 2024

Dorothea Brumm (82 Jahre), November 2024

25 years of service to the Essberger fleet

Patricia von Rantzau presented the 25 Years' Service Award to Captain Paulo Santos (left) and Chief Engineer Sipke Hielke Steenbergen (3rd from left) on the occasion of the Sudermuehlen Captains and Officers Seminar dinner. Johan Isaksen, Head of Essberger Shipmanagement (right), also attended.

A landmark at the Liselotte-von-Rantzau-Platz

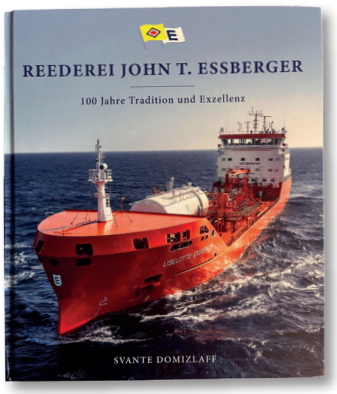
Built on a historic site in Hamburg's new HafenCity the Roots building is Germany's tallest timber skyscraper/ Streets and squares named after women who made outstanding contributions to Hamburg

After a construction period of four years, the high-rise building called "Roots" was recently completed in the east of Hamburg's "HafenCity". The building has 19 storeys and a seven-storey block on its eastern side. Roots is a timber construction with a load-bearing staircase core and a steel-concrete base. With a height of 65 metres, Roots is the tallest timber skyscraper in Germany. It was developed in collaboration with the German Wildlife Foundation, which has its headquarters there. The building houses have 128 owner-occupied flats. The seven-storey block offers 53 publicly subsidised rental flats. There will also be catering and office space. The Wildlife Foundation is a non-profit organisation that has been in existence since 1992. It occupies two floors with an exhibition area, a learning workshop for school and kindergarten classes and a cinema.

Why are we telling you this? While the south side of the high-rise building is located directly on the partially filled Baakenhafen, the former Africa terminal of Deutsche Afrika-Linien, the entrance area on the north side is located on the as yet unfinished Liselotte-von-Rantzau-Platz. Liselotte headed the John T. Essberger/Deutsche Afrika-Linien shipping group in the second Essberger/von Rantzau generation. A promenade runs along the shore. Historic port cranes are a reminder of the former use of the site. The streets and squares in this eastern part of HafenCity are mainly named after women who have made outstanding contributions to Hamburg.

The Liselotte-von-Rantzau-Platz, for example, is accessed via Lucy-Borchard-Straße, named after the shipowner who was expelled from Germany in 1938 and whose "Fairplay" tugboats once also pulled Essberger ships through the port of Hamburg. Liselotte and Lucy rendered outstanding services to German shipping.

The Liselotte-von-Rantzau-Platz in front of the "Roots" Tower is still under construction



Anniversary book now also available in your bookshop

The Essberger book on the history of John T. Essberger was published just in time for the shipping company's anniversary this summer. Many copies were distributed to employees, customers and business partners. At the request of the von Rantzau family, at least three copies should be part of the on-board library on all ships in our fleet and be available to the captain as a gift for VIP guests.

In the meantime, it has become apparent that there is also increasing demand for it in bookshops.

The book is entitled "Reederei John T. Essberger – 100 Years of Tradition and Excellence", the text is bilingual German/English, it has 304 pages and weighs four and a half pounds. It is available at a price of €49.95 from Amazon, any other bookshop or directly from Koehler Verlag (www. koehler-mittler-shop.de) (ISBN: 978 - 3 -7822 - 1544 - 2).

For more information on the **DAL/JTE Group** please contact Svante Domizlaff, tel: +49 40 38016-611, email: svante.domizlaff@rantzau.de or the German head office **Deutsche Afrika-Linien** Palmaille 45, 22767 Hamburg, tel: +49 40 38016-0, fax: +49 40 38016-663, email: contact-dal@rantzau.de or **Essberger & Stolt Tankers** Palmaille 45, 22767 Hamburg, tel: +49 40 38016-0, email: chartering@es-tankers.com

"Elsa Essberger" & Co – the adventure of building tankers in post war-times

John T. Essberger is currently in the middle of an extensive newbuilding programme. All tankers already delivered and those still under construction are being built at Chinese shipyards. Until the 1990s, our tankers were mainly built in Germany. If we look back at the history of the first three tankers with the name "Elsa Essberger", built in 1930, 1952 and 1968, we learn of "bankruptcies, bad luck and breakdowns" ("Pleiten, Pech und Pannen") that do not cast a favourable light on the German shipyard industry. Elsa Essberger (1898–1977), whom the three ships were named after, was the wife of the founder of the shipping company John T. Essberger (1887–1956). On the christening of the third ship on 16 August 1968 in Kiel, she went into detail about past mishaps in her speech at the post-naming dinner. Here are some quotes from it: "The ship begins to take on a kind of personality when it is named. But it only reveals its characteristics when it is underway. The first 'Elsa' was a twin-screw tanker of 1,173 dwt, built in Hamburg.

On its first voyage in December 1930, the ship ran into the canal embankment after leaving the Kiel Canal lock and was stuck there. The circumstances of the ship's inability to steer were to be investigated later in the dock. First, however, the voyage continued to Konigsberg (Kaliningrad) with a cargo of petrol. In the Baltic Sea, the captain telegraphed that both shafts were broken and he had to call for towing assistance. The shafts and propeller were replaced and the problem was solved. It could have turned out worse. On a subsequent voyage to Canada, it was so stormy on the North Atlantic that the captain switched off the engine, closed all the hatches and let the ship drift, much like Noah's ark during the Flood. On the return journey, the steering system broke. With improvised steering from the aft galley, the ship was able to reach the next port."

"During the last war, the ship escaped the bombs. But it was confiscated by the British immediately afterwards. And now the miracle happened. Our little ship came back to us in Hamburg from England. We found it moored in the Waltershof port section. No one was on board, no news and no documents were handed over to us. Neighbours had already started to get useful things out of the ownerless ship. We quickly manned the 'Elsa Essberger' with two men. This small tanker, now named the 'Lisa Essberger', was soon back on the North Atlantic and was admired and marvelled at back home as the largest ship in the German merchant fleet."

Are they all friends and acquaintances? Crowd at the launching ceremony of "Elsa Essberger" in 1952, Deutsche Werft AG, Hamburg. Back in her day, she was the biggest ship of the German merchant marine fleet

"It wasn't until 1952 – seven years after the end of the war – that we were able to order a larger motor tanker from Deutsche Werft shipyard in Hamburg. The christening and launching of the new 'Elsa Essberger' was a great festive event. From the christening rostrum, you could see a huge crowd of happy and festively dressed people on the shipyard site. I asked Carola Scholz, the shipyard director's wife, who was standing next to me, 'Are they all your friends and acquaintances?' To my astonishment, she said, 'No, Elsa, they're all yours!'.

At 16,800 dwt, this Elsa was by far the largest ship in Germany at the time. That's why so many people came to the launch. One company even brought an advertising poster with a picture of a rubber boot and the words NAHTLOS GESCHWEISST WIE ELSA ESSBERGER (Seamlessly welded like Elsa Essberger). Unfortunately, it soon became apparent that the material used in the construction was of bad quality. As a result, it aged relatively quickly and the 'Elsa' only lasted 16 years before being scrapped. This time, our newbuilding contract went to the combined shipyard Howaldtswerke-Deutsche Werft AG in Kiel. As you can imagine, we are looking forward to the completion of our current godchild, which will make its sea trials on 10 October 1968." Let's get this out of the way: expectations for the 100,000 dwt crude carrier 'Elsa Essberger' (3) were bitterly disappointed.

The 'Elsa' was in service for the oil multinational DEA/Texaco for four and a half years between the loading ports in the Middle East and Wilhelmshaven. In the summer of 1973, Inspector Schormair reported alarming structural damage to his boss Liselotte von Rantzau. A result of defective weld seams on the cargo tanks, repairs were urgently needed.

Schormair wrote: "This means that huge carriages have to be built for relatively small jobs, which take 90 to 95% of the time and cost. The repairs should have started long ago but were delayed due to a lack of labour. The shipyard scoured the labour market as far as Yugoslavia without taking costs into account. It is safe to say that the shipyard delivered us a faulty design." He then added: "The completion of a huge oil rig on time is currently making things particularly difficult for the shipyard."

The shipyard's semi-submersible drilling rig "Transocean NO 3" later also proved to be a faulty design with material weaknesses and as a result capsized in the North Sea in 1974. The damage caused by inadequate and poor welding work, which was recognisable as corrosion and rust, soon proved to be a bottomless pit. Not only the cargo tanks were affected, but also load-bearing parts of the hull structure. Rust was also a constant issue on the tanker's outer skin. Schormair suggested switching from the traditional "Essberger grey" colour to black: "Of course, the rusting is no less with black, but it is not visible to this extent." Under the name "Elsa Essberger", the ship sailed until 1976 after long stays in the shipyard, was then sold and scrapped in Thailand around 1989. By then, however, Elsa Essberger was no longer alive.

A ship named "Elsa Essberger" (5,297 dwt), built in 2013 at the Eregli Shipyard in Turkey, is still sailing in the "E&S Tankers" fleet today – without any construction-related problems. We now realise once again that construction supervision by our own employees is essential – even if you need to travel all the way to China.